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Panama: The government is seeking unilateral concessions by the US to set the stage for canal treaty negotiations.

General Torrijos informed the US ambassador last week that unless the groundwork were properly prepared by such concessions, he did not believe treaty negotiations would be successful or that the final product would be acceptable to the Panamanian people. In January top Panamanian officials had evinced a strong interest in the early resumption of negotiations without conditions.

Torrijos suggested that the US could demonstrate its good will by assisting with highway construction linking Panama and the Canal Zone and by returning certain areas within the Zone such as military airfields, the docks at Colon and Balboa, and a number of ship repair facilities. He also asked if Panamanian President Lakas could meet with President Nixon to work out an agreement on procedures and guidelines for negotiations.

Panama has long pressed for greater economic benefits from the canal, and very significant political advantages would accrue to Torrijos if he could persuade the US to grant the use of areas and facilities within the Zone to Panama. It is not certain, however, that Torrijos really expects the US to surrender many of its bargaining counters before actual negotiations get under way. His requests, therefore, may only be an opening position.

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